

First meeting of the SCB-ES Policy Committee Eberswalde, Germany, Dec 3-5, 2004.

Participants:

Martin DIETERICH (Germany)
Paul HATCHWELL (UK)
Pierre IBISCH (Germany)
Vassiliki KATI (Greece)
Barbara LIVOREIL (France)
Per SJÖGREN-GULVE (Sweden)
Tomasz WESOŁOWSKI (Poland)

Contents:

- Brief presentation of each participant:
- Introduction
- Basic organisational issues
- Role of the PC within the SCB-ES
- The advocacy issue
- Abuse of the terms biodiversity
- Sustainability discussion and nature conservation
- Bialowieza follow-up
- Biodiversity resolution
- ECCB in Eger

Brief presentation of each participant:

Martin Dieterich:

Ph. D. in stream ecology from Oregon State University. Desiccating waters as main object of research (adaptive strategies of aquatic organisms to desiccation as a high level disturbance). Long term SCB member, member of the Board of Directors of the European Section (SCB-ES) and chair of the Policy Committee. Works at the interface between science, application and policy. Lecture assignment at Hohenheim University and long term activist in a local NGO. Founded a consultancy (landscape planning, research and implementation), and currently directs a small research institute of the NABU (Bird Life International, Germany).

Paul Hatchwell:

Ph.D. on biodiversity damage in Mexico. Current emphasis climate change and industry. Research fellow, Biodiversity and Ecology Division, Dept of Biology, U. of Southampton since 2002; previously research at Telford Institute for Environmental Systems, Salford University and associated with the Instituto de Ecologia, Xalapa, Mexico. Journalist, environmental consultant. Strong interest to again put more focus to Conservation Biology. Focus contribution on media presentation of conservation issues

Pierre Ibisch

Biologist, Professor for Nature Conservation with the Faculty of Forestry, University of Applied Sciences Eberswalde. Has lived and worked over 9 years in South America (biodiversity research, restoration of degraded landscapes). Worked for the largest conservation NGO in Bolivia. Involved in the design of the national biodiversity strategy. Involved in the implementation/establishment of study programs related to Forest Ecosystem

Management and Global Change Management. Among others, interested in strategic conservation management, design of conservation visions and strategies, especially taking into account the predicted climate change and its impacts .

Vassiliki Kati

Biologist, Ph.D. on Biodiversity assessment and conservation (reserve design, indicators using multi-species data sets). Lecturer at the University of Ioannina, Greece, scientific advisor in local NGOs and Council member for the management of a wetland reserve. Thinks that it is important to built bridges and links between conservation science and application. Science should not exist without implementation and vice versa. It is important to link conservation decisions at the local to global level planning and targets.

Barbara Livoreil:

Ph.D. in ethology and behavioural ecology, scientific officer in a small French NGO promoting the conservation of tortoises in France, Africa and Madagascar. Science is important because it allows to base decisions on evidence rather than beliefs. Expectations are to be helpful and devote some time to nature conservation at the European scale.

Per Sjögren-Gulve:

Animal ecologist working for the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency since 1995 and associate professor in conservation biology at Uppsala University. Interested in nature conservation and population viability analysis in particular (population dynamics). Works on species Action Plans within the Swedish EPA and in 2 research programs. Was invited by Georgina Mace to the first meetings of the pre SCB-ES Board.

Tomasz Wesolowski:

Biologist and professor at Wroclaw University. Focus on avian research. Standard pattern: Predicts what is going to happen and then tries to prevent things from happening. Not a member of the society.

Introduction

The meeting in Eberswalde was very successful. It provided room for very open and active discussions. The list of topics ranged from basic organizational issues to strategies on how to efficiently produce results favouring nature conservation. A field trip gave insight into conservation projects in the Eberswalde vicinity (e.g., Lower Odra Valley National Park, Schorfheide Biosphere Reserve). The meeting also generated a rather voluminous list of tasks to work on, and the necessary enthusiasm among the PC members to actually tackle those tasks. The protocol is structured according to the major topics discussed during the meeting. It focuses on the key issues and key statements, rather than providing a precise listing of contributions.

Basic organisational issues

The PC meets once a year between November 15th and March 15th. Meetings will preferably be scheduled before the annual SCB-ES BOD meetings that are held in spring. Organisation and localisation switches between PC members and countries represented. The meeting in 2005 is going to be in Southern France.

Written documents will be circled through the PC using the europolicy@conbio.org address. Maximum number of iterations is 3. Deadlines for responses should be provided by authors when submitting a document. Members that cannot meet deadlines can request an extension. If an extension of the deadline is not requested and there is no answer then this is considered as approval.

PC members have to act responsibly when using the SCB-ES PC affiliation (acting as PC representative). Any PC member can represent the committee upon approval by the chairman or the majority of the PC members (active or passive representation). Prior approval is not compulsory if statements are based on existing and approved SCB-ES documents.

When communicating information to the print media, PC members should ask for an opportunity to proof read documents to be published. If contributions are made for radio or TV, then such contributions should be accompanied by a hand written document that contains the basic/critical contents of the contribution. If this is not possible, contributions should be refused.

Role of the PC within the SCB-ES

PC was established in 2003 during the Eglingen SCB-ES-BOD meeting. The strategy document describing the basic task of the PC was passed in spring 2004. Basic task include:

- to further the mission of the SCB-ES by developing policy and strategy for relationships with political, scientific, and other pertinent organisations;
- - to develop Resolutions and Statements of Public Advocacy that explain the Section's view on a particular issue or controversy;
- to support and advise the membership in questions and action relating to policy issues.

As any committee, the PC is, at any time, accountable to the Section Board. Strategies and actions proposed by committees have to be approved by the SCB-ES Board of Directors.

Possible changes in the strategy document were discussed. . We intend to work on problems relevant at a European scale. However, as patterns relating to implementation are often decided at the local level, the PC may address appropriate local problems and place them into a broader context. Therefore, we will seek and value input from the SCB-ES membership and European conservation community when examining such patterns.

The following changes in the Strategy Document were proposed:

- add text regarding preservation of pristine nature;
- nature conservation has to include functions and processes;
- tasks and a hierarchy of tasks (objectives) should be included in the Strategy Document.

A revision of the Strategy Document should be initiated.

To improve the visibility of the PC, it was decided to

- install a website within the existing SCB frame;
- provide newsletter contributions (contact Erica Fleishman; efleish@stanford.edu)
- contact PC committees from other sections

It was suggested that the abbreviation SCB-ES was ill-suited to improve the visibility of the Society in the public. For the media in particular, SCB-Europe seems more appropriate. Using SCB-Europe in the media would not preclude continued use of a more official SCB-ES abbreviation in regular business.

The advocacy issue

The question whether the role of the SCB-Es should be limited to advising or if necessary expanded to advocacy was discussed. Advise would be to inform, while advocacy would include information and tools to actively trigger change. Advise has a strong re-active connotation (provide advise when asked) advocacy has a much more active connotation (advocate even if not asked for advise).

Oxford Dictionary, synonym dictionary and French translation:

to advise: give opinion; synonyms: to counsel, to recommend, to suggest.
French translation: conseiller.

to advocate: recommend; synonyms: to support; to recommend, to argue or plead in favour of.
French translation: préconiser.

The PC members present agreed that we should actively promote conservation and thus advocate as often as necessary. Advocacy should always and strictly be based on evidence. It should be limited to issues that are of international importance at the European level.

The basic difference to NGOs is that advising and advocacy will always be based on sound scientific evidence (publications, reports and/or data sets). As often as possible comparative assessments including information from all over Europe will be conducted. Training in scientific assessment and review is perceived as a key advantage in the context of public advocacy. Our assessments are evidence-based, not sensitive to contemporary political correctness.

The basic difference from other scientific organisations is the explicit willingness to advocate and go public if necessary.

Abuse of the terms biodiversity

Terms such as “biodiversity” or “sustainability” are technical terms that are not always correctly understood by the public. In some cases these terms are abused to foster goals that counter nature conservation. The Bialowieza Forest case offers some striking examples for this type of abuse (clear-cutting of old-growth stands to increase biodiversity). The fact that these terms are abused, however, does not mean that they are wrong or useless.

It was decided to collect examples for the abuse of these terms. Active membership participation will be required to contribute with such examples. In this context, adding positive examples may help provide useful cases and ideas on how nature conservation can be carried out.

Sustainability discussion and nature conservation

Martin Dieterich gives a short presentation on the different meanings of the term “sustainability”. Basically there are two definitions that are not compatible: Demand oriented definition (socio-economic definition), e.g. satisfy needs in the present without compromising the possibility of future generations to satisfy their needs (Brundtland definition, WCED 1987). Focuses on the satisfaction of needs and therefore is in line with standard socio-economic paradigms. Economics and social sciences as key players, concept can not be operationalized as future needs (wants) and future technological potentials for

efficient resource use can not be defined (quantified). Definition and associated approach contradicts the limited capabilities of ecosystems to satisfy human needs and wants.

Supply-oriented definition (ecological definition): Not more can be appropriated in a sustainable manner than what ecosystems produce, and not more can be discarded into the environment than what ecosystem processes can resorb (recycle). Focuses on productive and resorptive capacities of ecosystems. Ecology as key player in operationalizing the concept (determine productive and resorptive capacities/potentials). Biodiversity seen as a key element to grant process adaptability and thus long-term ecological capacities.

Thus, the actual use of the term sustainability is based on completely different concepts. Unfortunately, the basics are never (hardly ever) defined, when the term is used. This causes severe inefficiencies in terms of communication.

Not all the PC members consider “Limits to economic growth” a viable concept. No further discussion on basic paradigms at this point.

Bialowieza follow-up

Tomasz Wesolowski provided an introductory presentation to the Bialowieza case: continued logging of the probably oldest and most famous old-growth lowland forest in Europe. This last pristine forest provides a unique reference to forest functions and, thus, forest management in Europe. He stresses the need for outside pressure to change the attitude of the Polish government and forest service.

The PC agreed that protection of pristine forest is a number one priority (even more critical with climate change) and that there should be an immediate moratorium in the Bialowieza case. The discussion centered on how much pristine forest is needed to preserve associated biodiversity and processes (is 10 to 20% enough?). In the context of climate change, in particular, the need for dynamic conservation was emphasized.

According to current information, Bialowieza Forest will become a Natura 2000 site. This raised questions on possible deficiencies of the Habitats Directive with respect to the protection of natural processes in general, and pristine forests, including old growth and dead woods as key structural elements in particular. An initiative towards modification of the Habitats Directive was suggested.

Current data on clear-cuts in the Bialowieza forest indicate presence of species that are protected under the Birds Directive (Annex I species). There is no need to worry about conflict of interest between the preservation of Annex I species associated with clear-cuts and Annex I species associated with primeval forests, as clear-cuts are not a critical habitat type in the area.

The PC agreed on the following actions:

- letter to the IUCN to address the case of old growth, dead wood and the conservation of biodiversity associated with the pristine forest (consultation of local scientists).
- letter to the EU administration asking for an immediate moratorium on old growth logging in the Bialowieza forest.
- letter to the EU administration asking for a modification of the ‘Habitats Directive’ to allow for the protection of processes (e.g. pristine forests), and the ‘Interpretation

- Manual of European Habitat' types to more focus on the significance of old growth and dead wood as a key structural component of natural forest ecosystems;
- input to the manuscript on the Bialowieza issue written by Tomasz Wesolowski to be submitted as an editorial to the journal "Conservation Biology"
- articles to media, in order to raise public awareness and raise outside pressure on Polish government (individual initiative).

Biodiversity resolution

The biodiversity resolution points to the continuing decline of biodiversity in Europe, in spite of the declaration issued by European governments to halt further loss of biodiversity by the year 2010. An expanded role of conservation scientists and better communication between scientists and managers is the focus of the biodiversity resolution. Increased involvement of conservation biologists and better communication are perceived as keys to improve results from legal instruments targeting the preservation of biodiversity. The biodiversity resolution has already been approved by the membership. The discussion therefore focused on the accompanying letter and the press release.

It was stressed that the accompanying letter has to acknowledge initiatives by the EU to improve communication. The usefulness of a target to halt further loss of biodiversity by 2010 was discussed, as loss of biodiversity (including population extinction) is also a natural phenomenon and a basic component of ecosystem dynamics. Another question was if it is really useful to work with too ambitious goals that cannot be accomplished (could be even counter-productive). However, defining a clear goal and time frame serves to focus attention and helps push political agenda. The Kyoto protocol can serve as an example that has efficiently helped to stir up the public opinion in favour of environmental protection. There is a necessity to offer stringent targets in order to gain public support.

The general need to personally meet with EU officials and discuss the issues raised in the biodiversity resolution was stressed. This urgent message is to be forwarded to the BOD of the European section by the PC chair.

The PC agreed on the following actions:

- press release to be drafted and subsequently submitted to the BOD for approval;
- letter(s) accompanying the resolution to be drafted and subsequently submitted to the BOD for approval;
- urgent request for meeting with EU officials forwarded to the BOD (BOD meeting in Budapest in January 2005).

ECCB in Eger

The website for the 1st European Congress of Conservation Biology (ECCB) is now available at www.eccb2006.org. PC committee members agreed that the congress offers unique opportunities for Conservation Biology in Europe. A congress that is well organized and well run will also be a key to increase the overall profile of the SCB-ES. Input from the SCB-ES membership for the congress title, congress focus and titles of symposia is still needed. Basic decisions on organization will be made during the SCB-ES BOD meeting in January 2005.

The discussion focussed on ideas relating to topics and symposia titles. “Natura 2000”, “indicators for monitoring and evaluating biodiversity”, “management approaches”, “genetic methods in nature conservation”, “pristine environments and their preservation” with a specific focus on Eastern Europe (Russia) and the Balkans, “impact of climate change on biodiversity” and a specific session on environmental law were proposed.

An innovative approach to communication was considered a key determinant of congress success. Proposals included a conservation market featuring opinions, projects and products, a forum for exchange between actual projects, a celebrity room for students to meet with speakers and conservation “celebrities”, and a web forum started during the meeting, but extending beyond the closing date of the meeting.

Lists will be sent to PC committee members to formalize proposals and suggestions.

List of tasks

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|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Publish protocol (web page) | Barbara, Martin | end of January |
| • Contact other PC's | Pierre | January, 31 st |
| • Letter to EU, moratorium logging Bialowieza | Martin | January, 20th |
| • press release moratorium | Paul | |
| • List of main questions for meeting with EU officials (including proposed changes in Habitats Directive) | Per | |
| • Strategy document revision | Pierre, Martin | January 15th |
| • Collect cases where nature conservation is used to justify destruction | Paul, Kiki (coordinators) | |
| • Tomasz paper | Tomasz | January, 15 th |
| • Scientists call (WWF) | Tomasz | January, 31st |
| • Contacts in Poland | Tomasz | January, 31st |
| • Revision cover letter(s) biodiversity resolution | Per | December, 31st |
| • Revision biodiversity press release | Barbara, Paul | December, 31 st |
| • Linking academics with conservation | Kiki | |
| • Issues relating to ECCB2006 | Martin (coordinator) | January, 15th |
| • Symposia titles | | |
| • suggestions scientific committee | | |
| • suggestions plenary speakers and titles | | |
| • funding sources (addresses) | | |
| • Ideas, on how it will be run | | |
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| • Next meeting | Barbara, France | early December 2005 |
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Points to be raised during BOD meeting in Budapest

- home page/PC web site within conbio domain
- procedures on who can speak for the PC/possibility of mandates
- use of SCB Europe as an official abbreviation in contacts with the media
- workshop on media involvement press for/ask for meeting with EU officials